

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 8, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Deborah Zuaro (NCC Chair), Russ Barrett (NCC/TFSC member), Lydia Petty (TFSC member), Colin Bright (TFSC member), Nelson Hoffman (TFSC member), Nigel Hicks-Tibbles, Casey Cutkomp, Kim Caldwell, Susan Barnard, Gordon Bock, and Carolyn Stevens.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Manager Schulz asked to have a discussion of the Emerald Ash Borer Grant added to the agenda. There was no objection.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

a. Deborah Zuaro, Chair, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC)

- 1. NCC Town Forest Trail Requests.** Ms. Zuaro noted the Select Board members approved the NCC-generated "Town Forest Stewardship Plan" in October 2019. One of its provisions was the creation of a NCC subcommittee, known as the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC), that would focus on matters related to the Northfield Town Forest and make recommendations for action to NCC members and (ultimately) the Select Board members. Lydia Petty is a TFSC member and she will discuss recent TFSC activities as well as their recommendations regarding the trail system. Ms. Petty said the TFSC has been meeting monthly since August 2020 and has been using field trips, GPS, etc. in order to properly map both authorized and unauthorized public trails traversing through the Town Forest and adjoining private properties. She said some of the unauthorized trails have been in place for some time ("historic") while others are of more recent origin. Regarding the trail segments that go through private property, the TFSC members have made preliminary contact with the land owners to determine if they would permit the trail to continue to exist. A formal landlord permission form has been drafted that will be distributed once Select Board authorization has been granted. Ms. Petty also is requesting that the Select Board members formally adopt the currently unsanctioned trails known as 1, 2a, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The Select Board members were provided with a map showing their locations. There is an additional recommendation that unsanctioned trail 2b be removed from the trail system. Board member Stevens asked if these trails are all located on private lands. Mr. Petty said all of them go through the Town Forest but some do go through private property. In the absence of signed landlord permission forms, the NCC and TFSC are only asking for approval of the trail segments that are located within the Town Forest. TFSC member Russ Barrett said the trails segments located on private property will not be put on the trail system map until land owner permission has been granted. Board member Miller felt the process looks good but he would like to see legal review of the landlord permission form before it is distributed for signatures. He also suggested it might be best to have separate forms for authorizing existing trails and for new trails. Ms. Petty said the permission form was drafted based on those used in other Vermont municipalities. She will research to determine whether a separate form for new trails is needed.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the unsanctioned trails known as 1, 2a, 4, 5, 6, and 7 and approve the landlord permission form with the condition that the current wording passes legal review. Board member Morse felt there has been much misinformation circulating over what the TFSC members have been trying to accomplish. He noted that their meetings are publicly warned, open to the public, and minutes subsequently posted on the municipal website. The whole process they have followed has been transparent and in the open, not a sinister conspiracy as some have claimed.

Chair Maxwell asked if the Select Board members should withhold approval of these trails until after landlord permission has been received. Mr. Barrett reiterated that the TFSC members are only seeking approval of the trail segments located on municipal property. TFSC member Colin Bright added this permission will allow further outreach to the property owners as this will be evidence the Select Board members would like these specific trails to continue. Board member Goodrich doesn't oppose any of these trails but would like to have landlord permission before authorizing them. The original motion was withdrawn without objection.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize Manager Schulz to seek legal review of the submitted landlord permission form. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Ms. Petty will work with Manager Schulz on this and bring the form back for Select Board approval should it pass legal muster (or provide a revised version that does).

Ms. Petty asked if the Select Board members would agree to remove trail 2b at this time. Mr. Barrett said this trail was set up last year without TFSC permission and should be discontinued before more people make use of it this summer. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to discontinue Trail 2b. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

A separate NCC/TFSC request was to seek a "cease and desist" order for a non-member who has repeatedly interfered in the trail approval process. It was suggested that this issue involved legal concerns that might best be discussed in executive session. There was no objection.

Ms. Zuaro felt it was important for the NCC and TFSC members to get some indication that the Select Board members are supportive of their efforts in regards to the Town Forest trail system and related matters. She felt the actions taken tonight were good steps forward in this process. Chair Maxwell said the approval of the two separate motions should be proof of the Select Board members' appreciation for the NCC/TFSC work that has been done so far.

2. **Appointment of NCC Member.** There have been two (2) vacant positions on the NCC for several months. Ms. Zuaro said new Northfield resident and attorney Nigel Hicks-Tibbles has had prior experience in helping manage public parks back in Colorado and he has submitted a letter of interest for one of the positions. Mr. Hicks-Tibbles confirmed his past experience in such matters and his intention to get involved in public affairs as a new community member. Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members welcomed Mr. Hicks-Tibbles to Northfield, noted his impressive resumé, and appreciated his sense of community service. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Nigel Hicks-Tibbles to the Northfield Conservation Commission. This is a four-year appointment. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **May 25, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #23-21.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve Warrant #23-21 in the amount of \$2,572,608.59. Board member Goodrich noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,129,191.60 represented property tax funds collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. In addition, \$31,612.26 was spent on the South Main Street Sidewalk Project and \$961,495.28 on the Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project. An additional \$216,811.61 was spent purchasing power for the Northfield Electric Department for future resale. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 30, 2021.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$97,384.29. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of 2021 Memorial Park Pool Schedule and Fees.** The proposed pool schedule and fees were discussed at the previous meeting (05/25/21) but there had been questions whether the user fees charged, unchanged from the 2019 summer season, should be adjusted. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Memorial Park Pool Schedule and Fees as presented with the addition of a ten percent (10%) fee discount for Northfield residents who are active-duty U.S. military personnel. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Grant.** Manager Schulz said the municipality received a grant from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) in order to address the imminent EAB invasion into Northfield. As part of the grant award, a local committee was formed to identify endangered roadside ash trees that should be removed and to hold public meetings to inform residents of the problem. About fifty (50) trees were targeted for removal and of these about fifteen (15) still need to be taken down. The deadline for all this work was June 30, 2021 but Manager Schulz will apply for a one-month extension. The FPR representative with whom he has been in contact has been pleased with what has been accomplished in Northfield so there should be no problem with extending the grant closeout date. Manager Schulz then thanked the NCC members who have assisted with this project and especially Tree Warden Russ Barrett. Chair Maxwell visited Connecticut recently and was shocked by the EAB devastation there of ash trees.
- c. **Winter Sand and Crushed Stone Bids.** Manager Schulz said bid forms were sent out some time ago to road material suppliers in the region and bids were closed at 1:00 p.m. this afternoon. Unfortunately, we only received one (1) bid each for winter sand and for crushed stone. The sole bid for winter sand was from Tabor Earth Excavators (Northfield, VT) for a delivered price of \$15 per cubic yard and \$12 per cubic yard pit price. The crushed stone bid came from Pike Industries (Berlin, VT) and is broken down into \$20.40 per cubic yard of ¾" plant mix delivered and \$11.17 per cubic yard pit price. The bid amounts for 1¼" plant mix are \$21.00 per cubic yard delivered and \$11.77 per cubic yard pit price. Manager Schulz reviewed these bid amounts with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker and both feel these are reasonable prices and recommend the bids be awarded tonight. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Miller, to award the winter sand bid to Tabor Earth Extractors and the crushed stone bid to Pike Industries for the prices listed above. Given the many complaints about tire-damaging road material used on the backroads over the past couple years, Board member Goodrich wants to be sure the material purchased this year will meet specifications and thus avoid a repeat of this problem. Manager Schulz said he and Mr. Tucker reached out to the suppliers this year to make sure the potential road material would be crushed properly to avoid this problem. In addition, there are plans to use a road roller to further crush the material right after it is put down.

Board member Morse asked why there was only one bidder each for these materials; we seemed to receive more bids in past years. Manager Schulz said suitable road material is difficult to obtain in Washington County. A lot of good gravel is now potentially available in our riverbeds but the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) won't allow you to dredge for it. Also, state permits for opening new sand and/or gravel pits are difficult to obtain. Board member Stevens would have liked to have seen the pit prices for the crushed stone suppliers who chose not to submit bids. He believes there was a request for this information last year. Board member Morse suggested tabling the crushed stone bid award until the pit price list is provided. Manager Schulz said Mr. Tucker does have this list but the suppliers did not submit bids because they did not want to commit to one price throughout the coming fiscal year. The listed pit amounts might be useful as reference information but can't be compared to submitted bids. Board member Goodrich agrees as the bid price is a guaranteed amount that won't increase for twelve (12) months. Chair Maxwell remembers that the Select Board members did request this information last year so he recommends tabling the crushed stone award until the next meeting. There was no objection and original motion was withdrawn. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Miller, to award the winter sand bid to Tabor Earth Excavators. Board member Morse doesn't feel the Select Board needs to take this action as this is a budgeted expense.

Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Morse voting in the negative.

- d. **Highway Paving Bids.** Manager Schulz said highway paving bids for work this summer on Slate Avenue and Central Street were solicited and there were two (2) bidders: J. Hutchins, Inc. (\$124,677) and Pike Industries (\$167,425). Manager Schulz noted there will be \$165,000 in the paving budget when the new fiscal year starts (07/01/21). He recommends awarding the paving to the lower bidder (J. Hutchins, Inc.) and he has been informed that if the bid award is done soon, they could start working next month. If the bid award is postponed, the work might be delayed to autumn. Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to award the highway paving bid to J. Hutchins, Inc. for a total amount of \$124,677. Board member Stevens asked if Slate Avenue would be paved to the top or just up to its intersection with Highland Avenue. Manager Schulz confirmed the entire road would be paved. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. **Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease Agreement (possible executive session).** Manager Schulz noted that at their regular meeting of May 11, 2021, the Select Board members voted not to renew one of their lease agreements with Turkey Hill Maple Farm. He informed the owners of Turkey Hill Maple Farm of this decision by certified letter and in reply received a request from them for the Select Board members to reconsider. As this is a contract negotiation, Manager Schulz feels it best to discuss this matter further in executive session. There was no objection.

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Stony Brook Road Bridge.** At the previous meeting, Manager Schulz said he had been unofficially informed that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) was going to award Northfield a \$175,000 grant to repair the Stony Brook Road Bridge. This has now been confirmed in writing. The Select Board members did budget the local match amount for this project so Manager Schulz will start the process of obtaining the required permits, hiring a project engineer, etc.
- b. **Highway Department Grader.** Manager Schulz said the grader now has front end issues and has been sent out for repairs. The estimated cost will be between \$20,000 and \$25,000 but the vehicle should be back in service in two (2) weeks. Board member Goodrich asked if we should rent another grader in the interim. Manager Schulz didn't think this was necessary as all the backroads have been graded at least once this year and some twice. The backroads now are in pretty good shape so any additional roadwork probably can wait for a couple weeks.

- c. **Grand List 2021.** Manager Schulz said the Listers are now completing their work on the Grand List and plan to file the abstract on June 15, 2021. Property owners with changes of assessment will be contacted so that grievance hearings can be held the last week of this month. If all goes well, the Grand List will be lodged the following week. This will allow the Select Board members to set the property tax rate at their first meeting in July (07/13/21). Tax bills then will be sent out by the end of that week. The Listers don't have the exact figure yet but the Grand List amount is expected to decrease due to the loss of several houses due to fire, etc.
- d. **Northfield Dog Park.** Manager Schulz has been in contact with Don Rhoades, who has been the leader of the effort to create a dog park in Northfield, preferably on the municipal property on Water Street near its intersection with Union Street. Mr. Rhoades has been making some headway in the process so he would like to address the Select Board members at their next meeting (06/22/21). This will be well-publicized so that members of the public, especially those living near the proposed site, will be able to ask questions and provide their views on the matter.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Purchasing Policy.** Chair Maxwell said he and Vice-Chair Goodrich held a remote meeting with Manager Schulz last week and among the topics discussed was possible revision of the current municipal purchasing policy. Manager Schulz will work on this and present his recommendations at a future meeting.
- b. **Official Northfield Municipal Logo.** Board member Goodrich noted the draft landlord permission form discussed earlier tonight did not have the official logo used in municipal correspondence, etc. but rather the logo developed more recently by the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN). Manager Schulz said there has been confusion over which logo should be used in certain situations. He felt since there has not been any Select Board formal action to replace the current logo with the newer one, the older one should still be used for all official municipal purposes. Board member Morse felt the newer one was simpler and attractive so perhaps it should be formally adopted in the future.
- c. **COVID-19 Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.** Board member Stevens noted that at the last meeting Manager Schulz said public hearings would be warned in order to obtain public feedback on how the \$670,000 in recovery funds allocated for Northfield should be spent. Is there a timeline for these warned meetings? Manager Schulz would like to start holding them within the next month or so. He noted that the first installment of these funds has not yet been received but should arrive before the end of this month.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

- X. **EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss contract negotiations, a legal matter, and a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:38 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:47 p.m. No action was taken.

- XI. **ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of June 22, 2021.